



The Value of Local Food Partnerships

Covid and beyond

Mat Jones, Sarah Hills, Amy Beardmore

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UK Sustainable Food Places Evaluation Report

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Executive summary

The Covid-19 pandemic, and – more recently – soaring food prices have focused attention on how local areas meet the challenges of a fractured food system. This report examines the impacts and achievements of Local Food Partnerships (LFPs) and how LFPs embed and amplify their work to deliver both local and national food priorities. LFPs have been uniquely placed to provide systems leadership and practical solutions through the strategic direction and support of the UK-wide Sustainable Food Places (SFP) programme, established a decade prior to the pandemic. LFPs have been able to pivot to respond with agility to an extended period of national crisis and have moved forward to offer a coherent framework for the transition of local food system. The four dimensions of ‘effectiveness’, ‘efficiency’, ‘engagement’, and ‘equity’ highlight the value of LFPs to fill the leadership gap on local food issues.

Local Food Partnerships and the Sustainable Food Places programme

Local Food Partnerships are cross-sector bodies that own and drive forward agendas on their local food system. In the UK, Local Food Partnerships come together as members of [Sustainable Food Places](#) (SFP), the UK programme led by three national sustainable food organisations the Soil Association, Sustain and Food Matters. The aim of SFP is to bring about a fundamental change in the food system. SFP seeks to catalyse, inspire, and support multi-sector, local partnerships to take a strategic and holistic approach to the sustainable food agenda. This integrated approach has gained increasing recognition, notably with the 2021 National Food Strategy advising that *all local authorities should be required to put in place a food strategy [...] in partnership with the communities they serve*.

SFP (formerly Sustainable Food Cities) was established as a network in 2011 and a funded programme in 2013. During the pandemic, SFP expanded its scale and reach to grow to a UK-wide network of 69 Local Food Partnerships (LFPs) by the start of 2022. With 23 new memberships in 18 months, LFPs now encompass many types of area: from counties, county boroughs to districts, as well leading urban centres. This is a shift that now connects the ‘demand end’ of urban food systems to the ‘supply end’ of agriculture, land use and re-localised supply chains.

Sustainable Food Places’ response to the pandemic

The pandemic exposed major inequalities in food access and affordability, disparities in fundamental food security, and the fragility of supply chains. In this context SFP pivoted its work to enable those within and outside the programme to respond to the unfolding food system crisis. SFP reframed its suite of grant funding, specialist resources, campaigns, advocacy, and tailored support. With website traffic rising by an annual 20% to

32,484 times in 2020, and a twitter community of 16,400 followers by the end of 2021, SFP became an authority on local food issues and solutions during the crisis.

SFP’s framework provided a platform for LFP action at the start of the pandemic. The SFP awards system requires participating LFPs to have a multi-sector food poverty action plan and delivery group in place. This preparation enabled prompt strategic action on emergency food aid. SFP was able to back LFP commitments through an additional £400k in National Lottery funding, alongside enhanced flexibility in SFP’s main grants programme.

The SFP national team reached out to local authorities and third sector bodies to advise on the LFP model, and particularly on emergency food and food poverty action planning. More widely the SFP national team used their convening power to broker links between leading policy actors to engender a more effective and forward-looking response to the pandemic.

Systems leadership by Local Food Partnerships

At the start of the pandemic, when statutory authorities were still developing mechanisms to cope with the scale of the food emergency, many LFPs provided a key source of leadership, drawing upon their insight into multiple aspects of the food system and experience of facilitating effective collaboration between public, private and third sector agencies. Trust developed through a history of partnership working enabled the swift deployment of resources where they were needed most. Many LFPs directly led or supported the delivery of government programmes at the local level. In 2020 in England, this included £16m DEFRA funding to frontline food charities and £120m DfE funding for holiday free school meals. LFPs worked on similar schemes in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

LFPs – and Partnership Coordinators in particular – acted as hubs for information exchange between multiple

types of agencies. Relaying intelligence across a locality in terms of population and agency needs and capacity was vital for the effective deployment of resources and support. LFP-established networks and knowledge sharing roles enabled communities that would previously not have come forward for food assistance to obtain appropriate support.

Building health and resilience through the food crisis response

Pandemic, Brexit, and the climate and nature emergency combined to show the role of LFPs for cross-cutting solutions. LFPs are at the centre of a new wave of local food strategies.

The pandemic saw large scale neighbourhood engagement in food support. For many individuals, these actions converted into wider involvement in food-focused organisations and networks. Local food partnerships were active in bringing together and mobilising these grass-roots groups. Through the lens of the SFP Framework, LFPs offered interventions that were framed by a holistic understanding of the root causes of food poverty and food insecurity. Local food partnerships took an active role in resisting unhealthy food donations and creating healthier alternatives.

Initiatives such as recipe kits, growing and cooking projects and food pantries provided support with dignity, developed food knowledge and skills, and strengthened community cohesion whilst meeting people's immediate food crisis needs. Emergency food collections and deliveries were used as an opportunity to provide wrap-around support that addressed issues such as social isolation and energy insecurity.

SFP catalysed and supported these approaches by enhancing its existing campaigns. In 2020–1, the SFP Veg Cities campaign was delivered by 22 places with 400 different organisations acting resulting in an additional 9.4 million portions of vegetables being served by caterers, 7200 people trained in food growing and/or cooking with vegetables and 250 different initiatives to monitor and reduce food waste.

Supporting local economies and food for the planet

With the food hospitality sector severely impacted by the pandemic, LFPs supported the work of chefs and catering staff to contribute to the food relief effort, build community cooking skills and foster community spirit. In some cases, LFPs have worked towards dynamic purchasing through new producer-purchaser collaborations and opportunities enabled through e-commerce. LFPs in Scotland and the Northeast of England developed collaborations to address barriers to sustainable public sector food procurement.

As climate change and the potential food chain causes of the pandemic itself highlighted the fragility of food and environmental systems, SFP was a main driving force behind an international campaign (The Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration) calling on local government to put food at the heart of local climate action and national climate policy at COP26.

With few local climate and environmental policies reflecting the interdependency of food and the environment, the SFP Food for the Planet workstream, provided a package of funds, expert advice, tools and campaign materials, to empowered both food partnerships and local authorities to drive integration in local policy. Seven LFPs and key food partnership stakeholders won significant Lottery Climate Action Fund grants for food-related programmes of work. With sustainability at the heart of SFP's mission, LFPs used solutions such as redeploying council-owned electric vehicles and the use of electric cargo bikes to reduce the carbon footprint of the emergency response. With renewed focus on food waste, many LFPs used their network connections to redeploy surplus food to feed those in need.

The beneficiaries of Local Food Partnerships

For the populations they serve, LFPs directly raised food aid funding through popular subscription, grant applications and actions to re-direct funding. In localities where they had the greatest influence, LFPs were able to channel public resources and actively organise provisions to meet the food assistance needs of groups with high levels of need.

Particularly for children and young people, LFPs promoted the nutritional quality of food provision and resisted unhealthy food donations or purchasing practices. LFPs led specific projects on tailoring food supplies to meet the needs of diverse populations such as refugees, homeless people, and specific cultural groups. This work followed on from pre-Covid LFP experience in addressing food insecurity and the delivery of food poverty action plans. It also built upon the work of SFP sponsored campaigns – notably Food Power, Sugar Smart and Veg Cities – where campaign reports show evidence of behavioural changes in LFP areas of delivery.

LFPs have also been responsible for efforts to organise access to affordable food through a range of food pantry and similar membership projects, food growing, community kitchen and cooking projects. These initiatives go beyond food aid to promote active food citizenship and longer-term solutions.

For community groups and grass-roots voluntary agencies, LFPs have been instrumental in building greater capacity for impact. The pandemic led to greater LFP engagement with grassroots food initiatives often building on large scale voluntary engagement in food support at the level of local neighbourhoods. LFPs were active in bringing together and mobilising grass-roots groups during the pandemic to create an agenda for 'good food'.

For food businesses, LFPs harnessed energy in the food hospitality sector to get more actively involved in social and environmental food causes. LFPs have also worked to address the systemic challenges to sustainable procurement, working towards dynamic purchasing through new producer-purchaser collaborations and opportunities enabled through e-commerce.

For local authorities and cross-sectoral bodies, LFPs provided a source of systems leadership drawing upon

unique experience and insight on multiple aspects of the foodscape and on the potential for collaboration between public, private and third sector agencies. As local areas look to the future, LFPs have helped put food system priorities at the heart of these recovery strategies.

The case for the value of Local Food Partnerships

Recent events show how four arguments express the value of Local Food Partnerships⁴.

1. Effectiveness – LFPs tackle the fragmented and siloed operations of local food systems. Working across complex and cross-boundary environments, LFPs are a unique type of partnership that coordinate action on dysfunctions and opportunities for change in local food systems.

2. Efficiency – LFPs encourage public, private and third sector agencies to collaborate and share resources. Examples from SFP member areas show how this partnership model provided a powerful way to create efficiencies, eliminate duplication and create innovative solutions.

3. Engagement – LFPs are designed to focus action on the interests of people and environment. This has involved the development of strong mechanisms for consultation and co-production. LFPs are configured to engage lived experiences and to find shared visions for change.

4. Equity – LFPs respond to the moral and legal case for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion through their open networks, outreach, and democratic structure. In embracing multiple voices, LFPs act as collectives working for food system leadership and change at the local level.

Amplifying and embedding the work of Local Food Partnerships

Food profoundly impacts every aspect of local life from health and educational attainment to job opportunities, sense of place and community cohesion through to nature and climate. The evidence from this research demonstrates the vital and multifaceted role that Local Food Partnerships played in the food crisis relief effort and in providing resilience and strategic direction for the post pandemic environment.

The knowledge, skills and backgrounds of key individuals have been at the heart of understanding the achievements of LFPs and the SFP programme more generally. The work of coordinators, chairs, task group leads, and others is complex and demanding. Local food transformation work requires an extraordinary blend of ‘hard and soft expertise’ that brings together technical knowledge and local insights with enlightened leadership, entrepreneurialism, business development, systems thinking and communication skills.

LFPs and their broader local networks thrive with passions and inspirational work of people from many walks of life. Much of the work of the SFP national partnership has been to bring together members of LFPs as a community of practice, to celebrate their work, and give a platform for their aspirations and achievements. Despite the continued support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (and in Phase 3 the National Lottery Community Fund), this work remains under-resourced. The National Food Strategy recommendation to require every local authority area to have a local food strategy is a welcome step in the right direction. If LFPs are to deliver their potential impact, attention must also be given to supporting local food system leadership and delivery teams.

Introduction

Sustainable Food Places and the focus of this report

The Covid pandemic has impacted every aspect of the food system, often revealing dysfunctions and inequities most visibly at the local level of everyday life. At the same time, the pandemic focused attention on the circumstances that created the situation and the opportunities for change. In this study we report on how UK-based Local Food Partnerships (LFPs) as a central component of the national Sustainable Food Places programme were able to deploy their established stakeholder networks, experience, expertise, and approaches to provide a rapid and holistic response to the pandemic.

Introducing Local Food Partnerships and the Sustainable Food Places programme

Local Food Partnerships (LFPs) are cross-sector bodies that own and drive forward agendas on their local food system. These partnerships involve local authorities and other public bodies working together with third sector, business, and academic organisations with the goals of promoting public health and wellbeing; fostering community connection and resilience; building prosperous and diverse local food economies; and helping to tackle the sustainability issues of waste and the climate and nature emergency.

Currently, 69 Local Food Partnerships are members of [Sustainable Food Places](#) (SFP), a UK programme led by three national sustainable food organisations – the Soil Association, Sustain and Food Matters. The aim of SFP has been to bring about a fundamental change in the food system. SFP has sought to catalyse, inspire, and support multi-sector, local food partnerships to take a strategic and holistic approach to the sustainable food agenda.

Alongside funding, specialist resources, networking, campaigns, advocacy and tailored support, SFP provide an awards-based framework of six issues for member local food partnerships to help shape and benchmark their work (Figure 1). The six issues framework has been adapted and refined to reflect the insights of member places as they feed practical learning through the SFP member network.

The first two phases of the UK programme were funded between 2012–2016 and 2016–2019 by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. In late 2019, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) and the National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) provided funding for a five-year phase 3 of the programme. This was accompanied with a rebranding from “Sustainable Food Cities” to “Sustainable Food Places” to reflect work with both cities and a broader range of localities.

By the end of Phases 1 and 2 of the programme in 2019, research² found that SFC had evolved into a mature and increasingly stable network of active member cities and

other geographical areas. Local food partnerships were represented in local authority areas that covered a total UK population of 20.4 million people. SFC had a diverse membership including some of the UK’s most economically deprived urban areas.

Figure 1. Six key issues and Local Food Partnerships



By the close of Phase 2, the programme had moved beyond proof of concept to show evidence of impact in a range of areas. Increasingly, SFC local food partnerships had a determining role in shaping changes at the local level. These could be understood as ‘critical pathways’ where, in the absence of SFC, it was highly likely that action in most SFC cities would only consist of fragmented initiatives addressing a limited range of sustainable food issues with limited impact.

Financial analysis showed that the programme had successfully leveraged significant additional investment. From the initial EFF funding of £1.7m, local food partnerships raised an additional £3.5m in cash and in-

kind contributions, representing a return of £2 for every £1 investment by EFF.

In Phase 2, local food partnerships obtained support specifically – but not exclusively – in the field of public health. A survey of public health professionals³ found strong levels of confidence for local food partnerships achieving public health priorities, taking a holistic approach to food issues, fostering collaborations, and driving specific new activity on public health issues.

In a context where sustainable food policy was largely absent at the national or local level, food activists operated largely in isolation, often making faltering progress through a frustrating process of trial and error. To address this, SFC offered a range of routes for knowledge-sharing and co-learning including virtual and live training events, and national conferences. The breadth and scope of SFC's award framework helped local food partnerships bring together diverse interests and adopt an organised and holistic approach to a complex field.

The SFC programme and its associated local food partnership model has been a subject of wide-ranging research. Much of this has positioned UK developments in the international context of a rapid growth of similar local food partnership models and their coordinating agencies in other countries.

Central themes of the research suggest that local food partnerships are a basis for bringing together disconnected issues across the food system; provide an innovative model for local governance and trans-local governance; are a promising format for convening formerly disconnected actors; act as an exemplar of community food action at scale; and are needed as a local component in the delivery of national policy on food.

Reflecting the growing body of national and international evidence, in 2021 the National Food Strategy Part 2 proposed that:

All local authorities should be required to put in place a food strategy [...] in partnership with the communities they serve (p.162)

and recommended this as a key action for a Good Food Bill in England. Similar proposals are at different points

of policy adoption in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

About this report

This report is concerned with the role of Sustainable Food Places, LFPs and local delivery agencies as they stepped up to respond to the covid pandemic. While the focus is on events in 2020–21, we examine how actions before the pandemic may have supported a more effective response. The report also gives attention to the way in which partnerships have used the Covid-related food crisis to accelerate changes to local food systems.

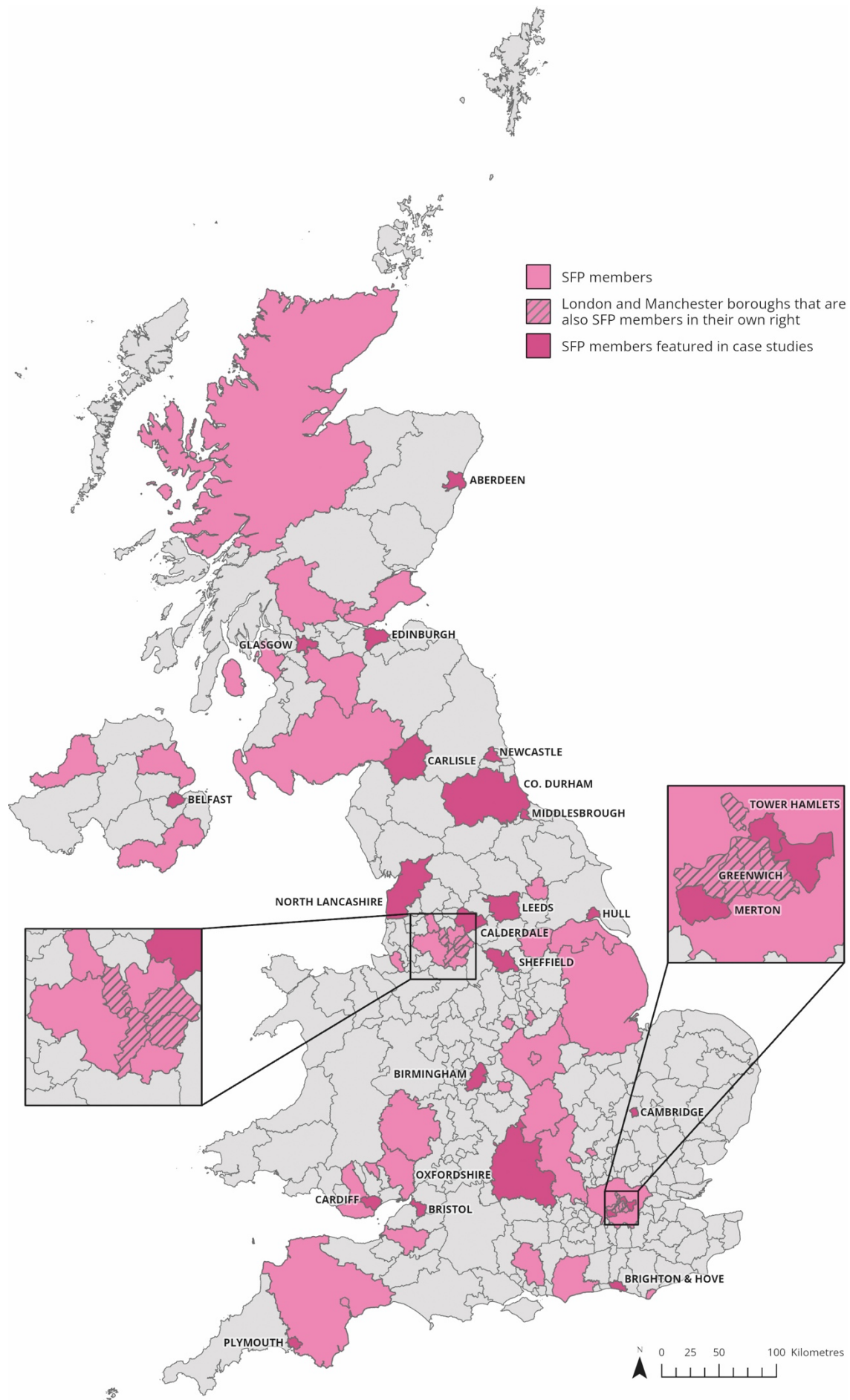
With evidence presented through the lens of the SFP six key issues framework (see Figure 1), the report seeks to address the following key questions:

1. What have been the impacts and wider achievements of local food partnerships and the Sustainable Food Places programme in the Covid pandemic? How, and in what circumstances, were these changes delivered?
2. What did pandemic events tell us about the significance of LFPs and SFP in food system and social change?

In this report we adopt a case study approach to draw out central themes from the experiences of individuals engaged with SFP-funded local food partnerships. The sample was taken from areas that had received an SFP grant during the period of the pandemic with an aim to represent different types of LFP geography. Between November 2021 and January 2022, we conducted 29 interviews and nine written communications with local food coordinators and associated stakeholders in 22 SFP member areas. These sources of information were supplemented through an analysis of grant reports written by local food coordinators from across the 69 members of the programme (Figure 2). Further details on the methodology are provided in Annex 1.

Drawing upon a range of sources of evidence, the report is intended to help funders, the SFP movement and wider stakeholders assess the role and impact of the national programme and local food partnership actions during the pandemic, and how learning from recent events points towards priorities for the future.

Figure 2. Local Food Partnership members of the UK Sustainable Food Places programme. Position in December 2021.



Two years of tumult

How the Covid crisis shook national and local food systems

This section sets out the backdrop to the role that LFPs played during the pandemic. What started as an emergency response quickly expanded into a wider crisis involving every aspect of the food system. The situation continues to unfold in a period of disruption to food systems that is without parallel in recent years. The pandemic put a spotlight on food issues that receive limited attention under more ordinary conditions, but which have been key priorities for LFPs since the SFP programme was established over a decade ago.

Access to food in the early weeks of the first lockdown became a leading public concern. As consumers queued to stock up on supplies, retailers struggled to cope with the provision of staples. Although most shortages were short term, these events marked the start of a series of shocks that were played out in local and national arenas.

Most visibly, food-based social inequalities were exacerbated by the pandemic.^{4,5} Food insecurity for families in the UK has been among the highest in Europe⁶, and lockdown disruptions served to make their position more fragile through loss of income, problems accessing foods and notably the lack of school meals through the closure of schools.

In measures that particularly affected low income and vulnerable groups, the UK government provided furlough payments and an uplift in universal credit. Both UK and home nation governments released funds for local government and voluntary agencies to provide packages of food aid.⁷ The Child Poverty Task Force successfully obtained government commitments on holiday food funding for children of low-income families.⁸

Local government and the third sector had to address the food needs of a wide range of groups including those most clinically vulnerable. The food poverty movement upscaled their activities, alongside a surge in volunteers and donations. Much of the response was driven through community groups and, most visibly, through mutual aid groups.

With disruptions and widespread public concern about food supplies, food workers became redefined as 'key workers' alongside those in the health and care workforce. The elevated risk of exposure of many food workers led to accusations that they were being treated 'sacrificially' to keep the food system running.⁹ Despite initial emptying of supermarket shelves, the global food system supply chain held up better than many economists had feared¹⁰ and the pandemic brought windfall profits for supermarkets¹¹ and global supply chain distributors.¹²

A combination of Covid and Brexit has placed strains on food labour supply, especially within the livestock and meat processing industries.¹³ While furlough and

business support payments were a lifeline, the course of pandemic events placed food hospitality services in a position of ongoing turmoil with limited ability to plan services.¹⁴ Many small and locally based retailers experienced increases in sales as consumers moved towards neighbourhood shopping. While suburban food retailers benefited from changing consumer behaviour, city shopping centres, malls, and urban high streets have lost out.

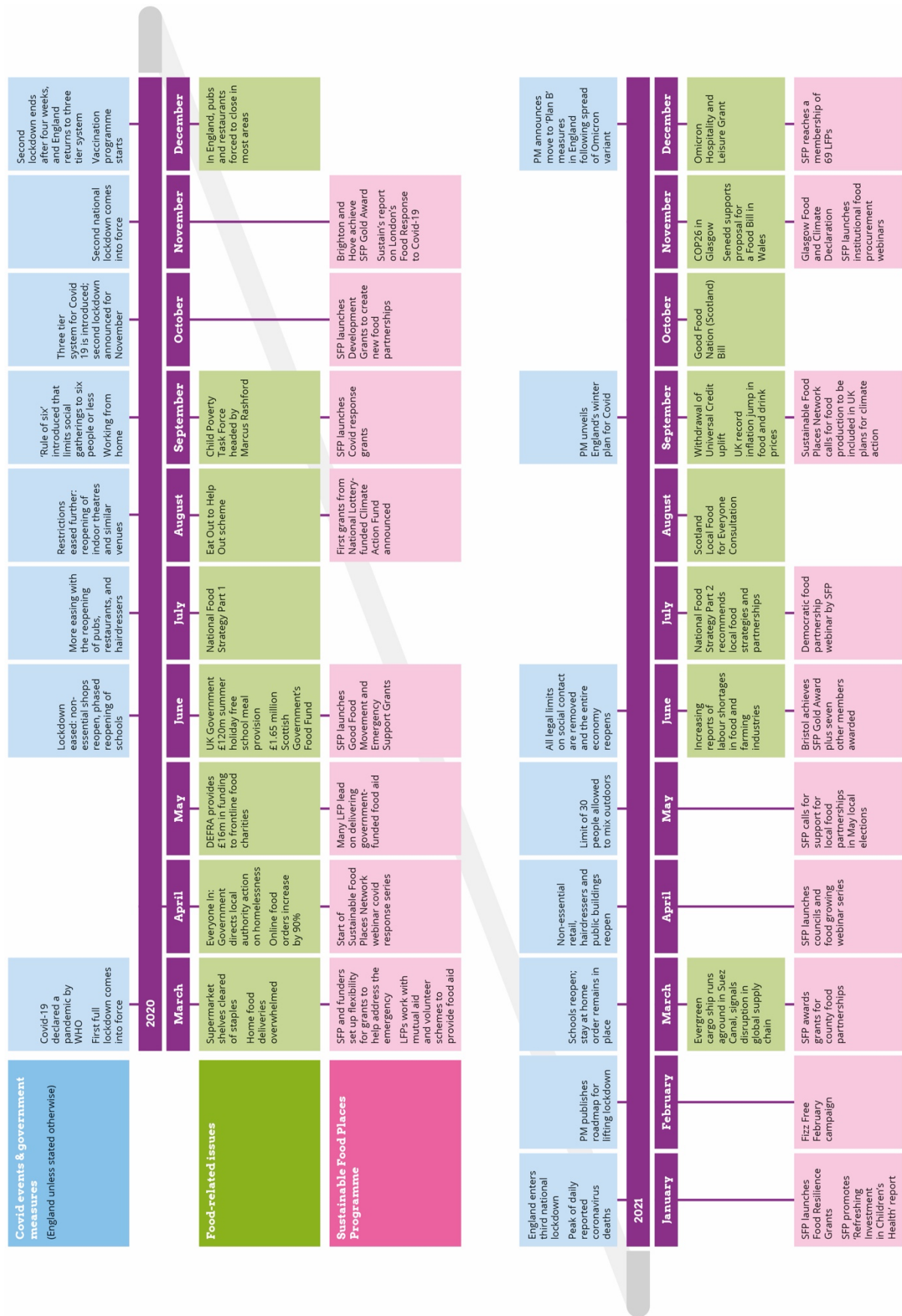
Food service and food processing businesses increasingly shifted to e-commerce and direct-to-customer delivery models, representing a further growth in internet-based food retailing¹⁵. Some initiatives combined social and environmental objectives and hybridised with community sector organisations.

Alongside social disparities in diets, lockdown restrictions drove overall increases in food consumption. Combined with restricted opportunities for physical activity and at-home food preparation to there was an increase in the rate of obesity at a population level.¹⁶ Concerns around obesity have been intensified with the associated health risks with Covid.

More widely, the pandemic has drawn attention towards the environmental aspects of the food. Animal welfare concerns have been highly visible through the theory of the animal-to-human transmission of the virus, attention on working conditions in the meat processing industries, alongside a COP26 debate on the environmental costs of cheap food.¹⁷ Food waste rises have been linked to increased meals at home. The food waste issue has also been made more visible through problems redistributing supplies from catering sector to retail outlets or the food donation/charity sector.¹⁸

The near future is set to bring acute food price inflation alongside pressures on public spending and ongoing shifts in food consumer behaviour.¹⁹ With conflict in Europe, the precarity and disruption that has accompanied the pandemic is set to become a new normal. In this context, the following sections set out the role of SFP and LFPs in directing and supporting organised local responses.

Figure 3. Timeline of the pandemic, Sustainable Food Places developments and food-related issues



How SFP responded to the crisis: an overview

In the face of the pandemic, the SFP national team purposefully pivoted the programme to ensure local food partnerships could play their best possible role and have the greatest possible impact. The crisis arrived at an early moment in phase 3 of the programme, requiring rapid decisions about immediate priorities and strategic direction. SFP provided a unique and multifaceted support system including resources, tools, and knowledge-sharing opportunities, enabling those within and outside the programme to respond to the unfolding crisis.

In the weeks following the first lockdown, SFP made the conditions for existing grants more flexible and provided additional grants to assist with the emergency. For some partnerships, such as Calderdale, these funds were critical to their operations given that other local revenue had been diverted or put on hold.

SFP produced a weekly newsletter, series of webinars and – later in 2020 – released a set of case studies of best practice in member areas. SFP ran a programme of online networking, learning and support events with SFP members. Local food partnerships shared innovation with each other to overcome problems and find solutions. Greenwich and Brighton and Hove led an influential webinar on coordinating purchasing and supplies. The SFP national team reached out to local authorities and third sector bodies to advise on the local food partnership model, and particularly on emergency food and food poverty action planning.

Both the SFP national team and individual coordinators advocated for action at local authority, regional and national levels. Much of this work bridged policy agendas such as the links between the climate emergency, social isolation, mental ill health, and transport. The SFP national team used their convening power to broker links between leading policy actors, for example on the holiday hunger agenda leading to increased and longer-term government funding, stronger guidelines on nutritional standards and requirements for multi-sector delivery.

Impressed with the work of SFP food partnerships to support people at the start of the pandemic, the National Lottery Community Fund provided an additional nearly £400k to the programme to further support its work to tackle community food challenges created by Covid. In 2021, SFP increasingly turned its attention towards the consequences of the pandemic through hosting 18 online events, regional member meetings and the launch of Covid Resilience grants, that enable places to continue to develop innovative community food responses to the pandemic and scale up tried and tested methods to increase their reach and impact. These

grants were vital for LFPs as they looked forward: SFP have been incredibly supportive. The Resilience Grants ... has enabled us to just think through some of the resilience of the projects that emerged. [North Lancashire LFP Coordinator]

- SFP expanded its scale and reach during the pandemic. By January 2022, SFP's memberships had grown to 69 local food partnerships, with 23 new members in 18 months. An aspect of recent memberships has been the range of new geographies, including counties, county boroughs and districts.
- SFP provided a framework for LFP action at the start of the pandemic. To become SFP award holders, LFPs needed to have a multi-sector food poverty action plan and delivery group in place. This preparation enabled clear and prompt action on emergency food aid.
- Many LFPs led or supported the delivery of government programmes at the local level. In 2020 in England, this included £16m DEFRA funding to frontline food charities and £120m DfE funding for holiday free school meals.
- SFP pivoted its existing campaigns. In 2020–1, SFP-sponsored Veg Cities was delivered by 22 places with 400 different organisations taking action, resulting in an additional 9.4 million portions of vegetables being served by caterers, 7200 people trained in food growing and/or cooking with vegetables and 250 different initiatives to monitor and reduce food waste.
- SFP attracted widespread engagement. Following a refresh in April 2020, SFP's website has been visited 32,484 times, a 20% increase on the previous year. By November 2021, SFP's twitter community had 16,400 followers and an average of 130 new followers a month.

Case Studies

Twelve areas of action
for Local Food Partnerships

Local food governance and strategy

1. Providing leadership for both the short-term and the long-term

In many areas, LFPs provided a key source of leadership drawing upon their unique insight into multiple aspects of the food system and experience of facilitating effective collaboration between public, private and third sector agencies.

With a strong track record in the local food poverty alliance, **Cambridge** Sustainable Food (CSF) became the lead organisation for the emergency food response at the start of the pandemic. CSF had close working relationships with community centres, faith agencies and other welfare organisations such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau. Building upon these connections, CSF established a three-pronged strategy of signposting, helplines, and Covid-secure community food hubs. CSF's food poverty work meant that it was familiar with sensitive issues around food aid and, drawing upon its national connections, promoted Nourish Scotland's [Dignity Principles](#) in the work of all the community food hubs.

Other LFPs were able to act as a role model for areas that weren't SFP members and, therefore, didn't have the structures in place to be able to respond to the crisis in the same way.

They don't have a food partnership at all. But they had someone in the council who tried to initiate a similar thing to what we were doing during the pandemic. We've worked with them before ... so he knew what we did and kind of learnt from what we did, I guess, to replicate it in their area for that short amount of time. [LFP Coordinator]

As a result of relationships established with supply chain and logistics operators in phase 2 of the SFP Programme, the **Middlesbrough** Food Partnership were able to lead on surplus food redistribution solutions.

Fareshare Northeast gave me a call and said, look, we are inundated with extra surplus food, more than we can redistribute through our existing groups, can you help? Can you take 20 pallets of food per week for the next eight weeks? So then working through the partnership we developed a good working relationship with PD Ports who provided logistics and warehouse space for free ("It is the least we can do to help in these challenging times" PD Ports). This then enabled us to support the Holiday Hunger Initiative with food for families. [LFP Coordinator] As the longest established local food partnership in the UK, **Brighton and Hove** Food Partnership (BHFP) was not only exceptionally well placed to respond to the Covid food crisis, but it was also able to do so with a level of insight that extended beyond the pressures of immediate events. BHFP's

understanding of the bigger picture helped organisations in the city deliver coordinated action that considered the longer-term implications of the situation.

Having a food partnership in place meant we were well placed to respond in terms of joining the dots in different bits of the food system. We were able to link different people together. [LFP Coordinator]

Prior to the pandemic, BHFP was already a leading member of the city's Emergency Food Network. The partnership convened an extended group of local organisations with a potential role in addressing food challenges associated with the lockdown. BHFP led a crowd-funding appeal to buy emergency food in bulk from catering wholesalers in the city. The appeal exceeded its initial target and when it reached £30k the council stepped in to match fund a further £30k to buy supplies.

With neighbourhood food banks struggling to meet the food needs of vulnerable groups, the council also provided grant funding to BHFP to co-ordinate the emergency food distribution through securing premises for a food processing hub. Through its community kitchen and retail connections, BHFP was able to organize combined purchasing through wholesale suppliers, local farms, and local businesses. BHFP state that these actions allowed the city to significantly upscale its collective effort:

In the week of 27th April 2020, 40 projects gave out emergency food parcels to 3001 households, supporting over 4831 people and served 3966 meals. In the week of 30th March 2020, this was 1400 parcels and 1800 meals. Prior to the Covid crisis, providers were giving 420 parcels a week. [LFP Coordinator]

In **Bristol**, where the Deputy Mayor chaired the SFP Going for Gold steering group, the strategic direction of the city's response was rapidly put in place through the close relationship between the food partnership and city leadership teams.

As Covid hit, I got an email from [the LFP Coordinator] saying 'We need to pivot and do it really quickly ... we need to refocus our efforts to help the food movement and support all the initiatives that are happening to get people fed'. So that's what we did, it was just absolutely amazing! [City Leadership Team]

2. Helping to channel public resources to meet population needs

At the start of the pandemic when statutory authorities were still developing mechanisms to cope with the scale of the food emergency, cross-sectoral relationships established through SFP food partnerships prior to the pandemic helped direct public funds to where they were needed.

In **Aberdeen** CFINE (the host organisation for the city's food partnership) took on a lead role in the emergency food response. They partnered with the local authority and procured an unused warehouse to expand the food storage capacity to meet the significant increase in people experiencing food insecurity. A range of public, voluntary and community sector stakeholders shared knowledge and resources to direct the emergency food response over the course of the pandemic.

CFINE did a rapid response assessment very early on in the pandemic. That helped inform the service delivery, in terms of looking at the demographic of who was accessing food support, whether they were accessing food support for the first time, and what the picture of what food support during the pandemic looked like. That information was useful in terms of being able to spread key messages about who was accessing food support. The sharing of information, and the updates at steering group meetings on [delivery] really useful. [LFP Coordinator]

Led by Food Poverty Aberdeen, connections into key community organisations via the city's food partnership enabled £69,000 of government emergency funding to be allocated in an efficient and targeted manner. Tapping into local knowledge via the food partnership's community organisation members was vital in this.

Some of that funding went to demographics and groups that conventionally wouldn't have been expected to approach for food support. So new communities were being supported. Communities

weren't excluded [from, food support], whether it be minority communities or geo-pockets of poverty that otherwise may not have been identified. [LFP Coordinator]

Similarly, the **Middlesbrough** Food Partnership's knowledge of community groups enabled council emergency funding to be delivered in a targeted manner that supported communities to move from reliance to resilience.

We were awarded £40k from Middlesbrough Council's COVID Recovery fund and made it available to smaller or fledgling community groups that wouldn't necessarily apply for or be eligible for this kind of funding. As a partnership, we used our position to be able to make that money go to where it was really needed.... The whole idea of the way we allocated the money is about building resilience and moving away from reliance on free food and handouts. [LFP Coordinator] Interactions through the administration of funding also became a strategic opportunity to deepen the food partnership's engagement with grassroots food initiatives and strengthen community engagement with the partnership beyond the period of the pandemic.

It was a case of bringing the grassroots partners closer to the fold within the food partnership as well. It had a double benefit that we developed more of a relationship with some of those that we knew were delivering great stuff with their communities, but they might not have had that much of a relationship with the food partnership per se. [LFP Coordinator]

3. Acting as hubs for information gathering and sharing

Given resource constraints and siloed responsibilities, it is difficult for local authorities and other agencies to grasp and act on the complexity of local food issues. During the pandemic, LFPs have been uniquely well positioned to coordinate and share intelligence through work with a combination of government, business, voluntary, and civil society representatives. Prompt communication reflected mature partner relationships established before Covid.

In **Newcastle** the food partnership had established relationships and mutual trust and played an important role in information sharing.

We teamed up with various other food surplus organisations in Newcastle and with the [public health team in the] council. Having that established link with the council was beneficial because it meant that we could do a lot more together. We were able to do something quite quick and fill the gap until the council managed to get all the systems in place. [Food Waste NGO]

With Food Newcastle we had a food poverty group established when Covid kicked off. We had already a group of people, not just the food banks but also other food organisations ... where we readily were able to bring people together. [Public Health]

Food Partnerships played a pivotal role sharing intelligence about what was happening across a locality in terms of residents' needs and what different organisations were able to offer. This enabled resources to be used in a timely and appropriate manner. For many coordinators operating on an intensive crisis footing for months at a time, this time went by in a bit of a blur, and we may never fully know the full impact of their role in giving vital information to key actors and in supporting emergency response initiatives. Nevertheless, as the lead in the social enterprise Food Nation stated:

What Food Newcastle did for us, and a lot of other organisations was just make us aware of what was going on, and what the need was, and how we could react and direct the services that we want to provide to help people. That was crucial. It saved us a huge amount of time and effort in terms of finding out all that information ourselves. It meant that we could put our efforts and focus into providing important services to help those in need. [Food Social Enterprise]

Reflecting the maturity and diversity of the food movement in **Bristol**, the emergency response was more devolved with key members of the partnership leading the response in their different spheres. Nevertheless, for the city leadership, the expertise and oversight of the food partnership was critical in informing the overall direction of travel pre-pandemic, during and beyond.

I'm not the expert in this field, I have to look to the likes of [the Food Partnership Coordinator], Bristol Food Network and all the other food players within the city. They come with a level of expertise ... and I am in awe of the talent that we have here in this city.
[City Leadership Team]

ShefFood is Sheffield's food partnership. Sheffield was awarded the SFP Bronze Award in 2021. ShefFood supports multiple local partners and describes their role during the pandemic as one of connecting, coordinating, and communicating. A key element of their Covid response therefore was to organise online meetings, distribute email bulletins and create social media posts to connect & support food system organisations, share best practice and coordinate local activity.

This rapid coordination between local food partners and stakeholders, enabled the management of a genuine food supply characterised by ShefFood as 'emergency mobilisation'. A key element of this was led by local partners, who formed a weekly forum for food provision stakeholders:

That weekly forum has maintained itself, and what it did was just accelerate a whole range of interventions to address food poverty, food insecurity in the city, that were kind of there anyway but weren't quite as urgent or as maybe as relevant as they suddenly became with the development of the pandemic. [LFP Coordinator]

ShefFood's existing connections with local food partners allowed them to be targeted in their response, capitalising on their links within the local authority. Partners were able to quickly network with mutual aid groups and grassroots projects through Voluntary Action Sheffield, thus extending the range and reach of local food partnership activities, and ensuring that everyone involved had oversight of the rapidly changing emergency response across the city. These links, along with the newly established communication channels, are now an entrenched feature for food partners across Sheffield:

We would never see the pandemic as a positive event in its own right. However, what the response to the pandemic demonstrated is something that we should be positive about. [LFP Coordinator]

4. Driving forward a strategic city food plan through the pandemic

The pandemic has created a window of opportunity to link food issues to the need for long term coordinated action at the local authority level. The central role of food partnerships during the crisis has presented opportunities to write priorities for food system transition into local strategies.

Ten of the established LFPs (**Aberdeen, Birmingham, Calderdale, Cambridge, Glasgow, North Lancashire, Leicestershire, Newcastle, Oldham, York**) published or were in the process of developing a new food strategy, plan, or charter in 2020–21. This served to develop and embed the strategic direction of their food work, drawing on lessons from the pandemic and harnessing the new focus and energy around food.

Glasgow Food Policy Partnership shared intelligence and lessons learned to lead the strategic development of the city's food agenda including the new [Glasgow City Food Plan](#) (GCFP) which was launched in June 2021 at an event attended by over 300 people.

The Food Partnership Coordinator played an instrumental role in the development of the GCFP, working closely with the multisector plan project team. This included being the main point of contact for the 80+ organisations that gave input to the plan, co-ordinating one of the 6 working groups and helping to analyse the 620 consultation responses. They also formed the working group that delivered the city's first Sustainable Food Directory in time for COP26.

The SFP Coordinator was fundamental in the [development of the Glasgow City Food Plan]. Just to get the plan to the point of launch and all the work going on behind the scenes and getting organisations on board. The coordinator was one of the key drivers for the plan along with the rest of the food plan team [Glasgow Centre for Population Health, Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Community Food Network, NHSGGC and Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership]

The coordinator also liaised with the coordinators and Community Response Officers of the Covid-19 Emergency projects lead by Glasgow Community Food Network. Together they have identified how the projects can support the GCFP actions going forward.

The GCFP is built around the six key food issues of the SFP framework and is now influencing many strategic areas of work across the city, including thriving cities, circular economy, food poverty and health.

Glasgow City Food Plan is now the main drivers for the city's food work. It brings together existing work and new initiatives under the same holistic plan aimed at

everyone in the city. [Glasgow Centre for Population Health/NHS Health Improvement]

The strategic foundation that has been laid by the Sustainable Food Places work and the Glasgow City Food Plan has also supported funding bids for significant pieces of work within Health Improvement.

Having all the work that's going on with Sustainable Food Places linked to the Plan, we're then able to go and ask for support if there's any funding available. We've got that strategic direction to back up that it's going to contribute towards the Plan or contribute towards Sustainable Food Places goals. [Public Health]

For example, the Health Improvement lead cites the role of the Glasgow City Food Plan in a successful £187,000 bid to the Scottish Government to support a food poverty-framed child healthy weight project.

The Glasgow City Food Plan [was cited] and the work that was going on would meet the aims of the children and young people section of the plan, but also in the food poverty fair food for all section of the plan. So along with the fact that it was a whole systems approach application meant that it was successful. [Public Health]

Foodwise **Leeds'** existing links to the local authority enabled the SFP co-ordinator to immediately connect with the emergency food lead within the council at the start of the pandemic. This, along with their other links within the local food network, enabled the partnership to mobilise a rapid response to the crisis at the earliest possible opportunity, attributable in part to the council's weekly calls which had already been established prior to the pandemic and that were subsequently opened up to wider stakeholders, thus allowing Foodwise Leeds to immediately feed into different food challenges across the city.

As the emergency associated with Covid subsides, Foodwise Leeds continue to work with the council, particularly on issues associated with food and climate. As a result, Leeds was one of the first cities to sign up to the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration and the council have been the first to recommend pledges associated with procurement.

5. Creating urban-rural collaborations across larger geographical areas

Originally conceived as a cities-based movement, SFP is increasingly supporting partnerships in a wide variety of geographical areas and in new regional collaborations. During the pandemic many LFPs have been bridging urban-rural divides, often with calls for assistance from neighbouring local authorities.

There is great potential to link the local food systems of urban centres and their rural hinterlands: cities need farm produce; rural producers need customers. With 24 county councils and 181 district councils in England, the two-tier local authority structure provides a promising basis from which to develop these links. Two-tier local authorities operate at county and district levels, with responsibility for council services split between them. District council groups often consist of a mix of rural and urban authorities and form county economies with deep historical roots.

The city based LFP Good Food Oxford (GFO) has been an influential member of SFP since its inception in 2014. The pandemic accelerated the extension of partnership work with neighbouring districts in the county of **Oxfordshire**. Since 2021, GFO became the first partnership to achieve an SFP award for a two-tier local authority.

At the start of the pandemic GFO expanded its Food Access Services Database and Map to cover the whole of the county. This interactive online map provides details of around a 100 food banks, community larders and community fridges. A consequence of the work was to bring together diverse groups together in one place. This map attracted the attention of the county council that been looking for channels to support community action. The map became an integral tool in the work of the county and district councils. The map already existed of the city – within two weeks GFO had expanded the map to cover the whole county:

The county council basically didn't realise how much was happening. They said "We've never thought about food. Really. It's not been within our remit, but [during the first lockdown] we heard that our communities were struggling." [LFP Coordinator]

GFO produced a report for the council on community food services to create a baseline picture of activity. GFO recommended that there should be community food networks for each of the four districts. The networks became a place for channelling requests for supply, demand, and expertise. Over time the attendance at the meetings dropped off but GFO found that this was because people were contacting each other directly now that they had established connections. A consequence of this work has been to form an Oxfordshire-wide steering group which includes a representative from each district, as well as multi-sector food representatives.

Part of GFO's work includes research-specific initiatives to inform county-wide decisions. For example, GFO interviewed producers of box schemes, retailers, and community groups to understand how they responded to and learned from the pandemic. The research showed that there was a demand for local produce but that there was not the infrastructure to scale up properly to make it easy for consumers to access it. This showed the need for long term coordinated solutions, and GFO is currently seeking to develop a big picture strategy along the lines of an Oxfordshire focused version of the Dimbleby National Food Strategy.

GFO's ambition to become a county-wide partnership existed before the pandemic. GFO knew that the future lay in building connections between producers and institutional buyers across the county. Operating at this level has enabled the partnership to build a more holistic picture of the local food system, particularly with respect to the sustainable food economy. A further positive dimension has been the drive towards greater local authority collaboration, with a healthy tension between boroughs not wishing to be left behind on responding to community food issues.

Similar collaborations are emerging elsewhere. From the perspective of district authorities, the role of local food partnerships ties closely into the [healthy place shaping](#) agenda of local authorities and the NHS. **Cambridge** LFP was invited to support other districts in Cambridgeshire and has recently been employed to investigate what that structure might look like in the county and the districts. **Brighton and Hove** have picked up food partnership work with district councils in East Sussex.

Plymouth supports activities across the county, in towns such as Totnes, and is a member of the Devon Food Partnership Interim Steering Group. A key feature of recent SFP memberships is the range of new geographies, including significant numbers of counties, county boroughs and districts. This reflects a re-balancing of the SFP Network towards rural areas and provides increasing opportunities to focus on food system changes related to agriculture, land use and re-localised supply chains, as well as to connect this supply end of the food system with the demand end of urban food partnerships.

Healthy food for all

6. Promoting nutritional quality and pushing back on junk food

In the context of the largest mobilisation of food aid in the UK since the second world war, many large food companies stepped in to make contributions. However, the nutritional and food standards of some donations led to concerns about the benefits for the intended recipients. Local food partnerships took an active role in resisting unhealthy food donations and in creating healthier alternatives.

Widespread news reports during the pandemic covered examples of chocolates, sweets, crisps, and soft drinks being offered to people with health conditions, low-income families, and key workers²⁰. One London local authority was offered 97,000 Easter eggs which they turned down to protect residents' health and to focus emergency efforts on more important fresh and nutritious foodstuffs. Many local food partnerships helped organise a coordinated approach to dealing with High Fat Sugar and Salt (HFSS) donations. LFP work on the Sugar Smart Campaign already meant that there had been cross-sectoral work to develop food and nutritional guidelines in workplace, educational and leisure settings. **Calderdale** local food partnership drew upon the Sugar Smart campaign network to obtain assurances on nutritional guidelines (which are not formally monitored) for holiday food provision for children entitled to free school meals.

Standard food aid packages often did not contain perishable food, such as fruit and vegetables, and often took the form of 'one size fits all' without taking into account individual medical, dietary, or religious requirements. **Brighton and Hove** Food Partnership, **Cambridge** Sustainable Food and several other partnerships coordinated action to organise fresh, personalised and culturally appropriate food supplies. In **Greenwich**, the council collaborated with Greenwich Cooperative Development Agency (GCDA) to ensure adherence to good food standards and to avoid processed foods that could be harmful to health.

In **Aberdeen** Vegaroonitooon was started as a response to people losing access to fresh fruit and vegetables during the pandemic. Vegaroonitooon provided a simple, affordable, and contactless way for people to access local

fresh fruit and vegetables. Boxes were delivered via sustainable transport (either an electric cargo bike if people lived within a reasonable distance of CFINE's premises or other forms of sustainable transport for deliveries further afield). It was a popular service that received excellent reviews via Trustpilot. In May 2020, 145 tonnes of food were distributed, over 345,000 meals and 8040 emergency parcels were prepared. In addition, 234 individuals were supported to navigate the welfare system. The project was wound down as pandemic restrictions eased, but was subsequently reinstated due to popular demand

Recognising that '*generic food is just not appropriate to everybody*' Foodwise **Leeds** helped set up two cultural food hubs in the city to reflect the dietary health interests of locally diverse communities. The pandemic accelerated the pace of change in areas that are relatively new members to the Sustainable Food Places programme. Sustainable **Merton** is an SFP member that became very active during the pandemic. The group developed a community fridge scheme (essentially a big fridge, located in a friendly space, where surplus food is donated by businesses and residents and redistributed to the community) in four localities in the borough. Community fridges make links with local food growers and works with communities disproportionately affected by Covid including Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents, older people, young people, residents with a disability and carers. The project brought together interests around sustainability and food insecurity and led the group to be commissioned by the local council to coordinate the strategic Food Response Network in the borough.

7. From crisis response to sustainable community action on affordable food

With the Sustainable Food Places Framework anchoring their response to the pandemic, food partnerships found creative ways to build community food resilience out of the immediate events of the emergency food effort.

In **Tower Hamlets**, the number of food banks rose from three to more than 30 in the borough during the pandemic. While this was an impressive response to the crisis, Tower Hamlets Food Partnership sought to create options that were “*more holistic, more dignified and where the [quality of the] food is more appropriate.*” These include projects that link and refer to other services that can support people to find routes out of situations that create food insecurity. With council support, the partnership is seeking to establish a network of food pantries and other food bank alternatives in the borough... As with other areas such as **Cardiff** and **Aberdeen**, food pantry networks have become a leading part of the food partnership’s aim for a socially just and sustainable food recovery plan. It includes diversifying the food sources, improving the food quality, and offering more culturally appropriate foods.

In **Carlisle** the SFP Resilience Grant was used to help build longer-term sustainability into networks that brought together affordable food hubs, food banks and meals-on-wheels services. The partnership helped to coordinate the provision of fresh (and in most cases free) produce, promoting healthy eating, grown by community gardens, allotments, and surplus from producers.

Refocusing attention away from emergency food provision, **Cambridge** Sustainable Food has funded and worked with three food hubs to explore the appetite for, and methods of, developing emergency food support into longer term sustainable food models. The hubs are designed to offer more fresh produce, particularly fruit and vegetables, offer locally sourced produce, a social space and engage a diverse range of residents in each local area. Additional work led to a new food hub with the Bangladeshi community.

Established prior to the pandemic by the Food Power Alliance and Middlesbrough Food Partnership, Eco Shops were a means to redistribute surplus high-quality supermarket food. Pre-pandemic they took the form of pop-up shops (‘social supermarkets’) in 13 schools located mainly [but not solely] in areas of high

deprivation. Eco Shops offer customers 10 food items for a suggested donation of £2. The model includes wider support, such as recipes and cooking workshops as well as signposting to budgeting, energy advice and financial assistance.

With the initial closure of Eco Shops at the start of lockdown the food partnership helped change the Eco Shop model to a Virtual Eco Shop, so that residents most in need could access fresh, high-quality, and affordable food. An SFP Resilience Grant supported the long-term development of the scheme through the expansion of the Eco Shop network into 13 additional schools and communities Eco Shops. The grant also helped create online resources to help with building a stronger Eco Shop network and to support the opening of more Eco Shops.

The grant made sure we built in an exit strategy: otherwise, we’re just doing exactly what we’re advocating against: creating a dependency then taking it away leaving people to fall off the cliff edge. We supported community Eco Shops to open and start moving the client from a doorstep delivery to them going out and accessing food themselves.
[LFP Coordinator]

The website was co-designed and produced with Eco Shop volunteers to ensure that it reflected the needs of its members and encouraged members to connect with others. By March 2021, Eco Shops were being accessed by 800 families per week. In one year Eco Shops re-directed 141 tonnes of surplus food. **Newcastle’s** Recipe Kit project is led by Food Nation and received supplementary funding through the SFP Resilience Grant enabling a scale up from 50 to 150 kits per week. The kits provide ingredients and simple recipes.

It was an empowering piece of work because it wasn’t just about giving people a ready meal or a bag of ingredients. It was trying to encourage them to become hands-on and learn about food and nutrition. Food Newcastle played an incredibly important role helping us understand what the need was and enabling us to focus our efforts on being creative. [Food Social Enterprise]

Good food movement

8. Cultivating a local good food movement

The pandemic saw large scale public engagement in food support at the level of local neighbourhoods. For many people, these actions converted into wider involvement in food-focused organisations and networks. Local food partnerships were active in bringing together and mobilising these grass-roots groups to create an agenda and a movement for good food.

While some partnerships capitalised on decades of community food action, other partnerships found new momentum in promoting and making new links between grass roots agencies.

In **Greenwich**, the drive to provide emergency food support has been reshaping how networks of agencies have been working together at the local level. An interesting dimension to this has been the effects on local food partnerships themselves, many of whom extended their links and collaborations over the course of the pandemic. Greenwich's rapid response to coordinating the food response put them in contact with an array of grass roots groups that had not previously collaborated on food movement activism

This experience caused us to take a different way to looking at things. We're now paying more attention to things are happening at the community level – like little groups and programmes that we weren't aware of. We can help them elevate and amplify the work that they do, not just on food poverty, but also [action on] climate change, food waste etc. [LFP Coordinator]

Food **Plymouth** enjoyed good buy-in from the local authority prior to the pandemic, with this relationship going from strength to strength during the crisis. The council had previously provided match funding for the co-ordinator's role and were increasingly supportive of the work of the food partnership.

This included funding the partnership's work around city-wide food aid coordination, including an additional food aid redistribution centre which worked with local supermarkets to provide a central venue for local food organisations to come and pick up food and other supplies.. Food Plymouth continues to capitalise on this working relationship and is about to launch the 'Best Food Forward' campaign, with the aim of *growing a good food movement with the people of Plymouth at its heart.*

Bristol sustainable food activism and enterprise dates back to the 1970s when the city's first food cooperatives, local growing projects and city farms emerged²¹. Giving voice to the array of sustainable food work across the city

is at the heart of the ethos of the local food partnership. Flowing from this, Bristol's bid to become a Sustainable Food Places Gold Award city (Going for Gold; GfG), had *at its heart an initiative to mobilise people where they are – at home, at work, in their communities – and create a space in which a Good Food Movement can exist and thrive, grow in visibility and status, and open new, simple routes for people to take action that will embed systemic change.*²²

At the onset of the pandemic the GfG team recrafted the Good Food Movement workstream to reflect the evolving needs and mood as the city responded to Covid. The first campaign *Bristol Food Kind* sought to explore themes relating to good food in a way that was sympathetic and relevant to people's lives in lockdown.

Launched in late 2020, the second campaign *Bristol Bites Back Better* (BBBB) aimed to enable citizens and organisations to contribute to the immediate Covid recovery phase. It also invited a city-wide conversation about building a better food system in the long-term. With an emphasis on the contribution made by community organisations to Bristol's Good Food Movement and a celebration of the food sector, [the BBBB website](#) included an actions section encouraging citizens and organisations to get involved and contribute towards the *Bristol Good Food 2030* plan. The GfG Public Engagement Lead and communications team trialled a number of public engagement methods including use-at-home online resources, distribution of 15K postcards to launch *BBBB* and a [Citywide poster campaign](#). A Community Participation Lead co-produced [5 short films](#) highlighting how diverse communities contribute to a better food system for Bristol. Each film calls on viewers to "Love, Enjoy and Respect" their food, translating this final call to action into the native language of the film's protagonist.

The Bristol Good Food Movement brought together 50+ community organisations under the campaign's banner and as part of Bristol's Gold bid. More widely, Bristol Waste, Resource Futures and Bristol City Council collaborated to get [BBBB school resources](#) to 171 schools in the Healthy Schools network.

9. Setting an agenda for neighbourhood food growing and sharing

During 2020, public demand for spaces to grow food surged, as people looked for opportunities to access fresh healthy food for themselves and others, as well as to improve their wellbeing²³. Local food partnerships have been instrumental in advocating for better, more equitable access to growing spaces and prior to the pandemic amplified this message through SFP sponsored local Veg Cities campaigns.

Many food partnerships, such as **Aberdeen**, **Carlisle** and **Oxford**, were instrumental in supporting home growing and community growing initiatives. They also sought to encourage take up in localities and with groups that faced barriers to accessing space and resources. In this section we focus on **County Durham**, **Cardiff**, and **Birmingham**.

In **County Durham** the SFP Resilience Grant was used to engage people accessing emergency food provision in growing and gardening activities through community groups and to encourage them to start to grow their own at home. The sessions took place at community venues in areas of high deprivation across County Durham including TCR Hub in Barnard Castle, Willington Open Door Methodist Church, Big Chefs Little Chefs in St. Helen Auckland and Shildon Alive.

Three growing sessions took place in each location and an additional cooking session took place in Willington and St. Helen Auckland. At these sessions participants sowed seeds and potted on plants to grow on at home. Due to the success of the project in Willington and at St. Helen Auckland, the partnership is in the process of identifying community venues in similar situations where this project could be replicated through training volunteers and community members on new sites.

Over the course of the pandemic, Food **Cardiff** has helped food growing groups and networks spread and establish across the city. Multiple neighbourhood food networks now operate, often independently of any city-level support.

Food **Cardiff** has been running a local Veg Cities campaign since 2018, and more recently had been working with Edible Cardiff to support a network of local small-scale farmers, allotments and community gardens in response to lockdown. Almost 14,000 plants, seeds and growing kits were distributed during lockdown as part of a city-wide campaign to encourage people to grow their own vegetables. A team of 70 volunteers across 16 projects helped deliver seeds or plants, and online growing classes were provided.

Windowsill growing kits were distributed in Cardiff Council's food parcels, food bank parcels and to other community groups. Vegetable seeds and grow bags were sent to children of key workers attending school and families at home during lockdown and seed packets were distributed to GP surgeries and care homes. Several of the projects have been supported with funding from [Food for Life Get Togethers](#).

Following the success of the growing initiatives, the Good Food Cardiff Autumn Festival was organised in 2021. The month-long programme consisted of Covid safe-distanced and virtual events involving community groups, gardens, neighbourhoods, and markets to inspire people to grow, cook and share food throughout the city. 25 partners held 45 free food activities, reaching over 4,000 people. 5,000 vegetable plants were distributed. Online cook-alongs, recipe swaps and cooking classes resulted in more than 1,300 meals being cooked and shared.

In **Birmingham**, the SFP Resilience Grant has been used to establish The Growing Network which seeks to mobilise growing power across the city by ensuring that everyone has access to the skills and knowledge required to grow their own food. The network – consisting of 175 members from across the private, public and third sectors – aims to break down potential barriers to growing through discussion and knowledge exchange.

The focus of the project is on understanding the factors that might prohibit people from growing their own food, particularly in areas of high social deprivation. This includes working with the Local Authority to bring public land back into community use and delivering capacity building workshops. So far, the Network has delivered a series of successful workshops to a total of 60 participants, 61% of whom were from Asian, Black, or mixed ethnic backgrounds. Membership continues to expand, and the network is beginning to mobilise across the city.

Sustainable food economy

10. Harnessing energy in the food hospitality sector for a regenerative food economy

Unable to work in sit-down dining outlets during lockdown periods, thousands of chefs and hospitality catering staff were keen to volunteer their services for the food relief effort. A remarkable feature of the pandemic has been the scale and variety of meals provision services delivered through these catering teams who operating through a wide range of venues and organisations. Many LFP members taking part in our research showed how this injection of energy is changing local food economies.

Edinburgh's emergency food response at community level has been co-ordinated by the recently established [Food for Good Coalition](#), mirroring other Food for Good coalitions in other Scottish cities. Working with the coalition, the Edible Edinburgh food partnership were active in helping 'repurpose' the private sector to contribute effectively towards emergency food assistance.

Quite a number of initiatives were started by chefs and others in the catering sector who have lost their jobs and livelihoods and others in the catering sector. And for many of them, I think there was a willingness and interest, but there wasn't necessarily a methodology of how to go about doing this. That's what the partnership was able to offer up more – a space in which they were able to get that level of collaboration and support.

Edible Edinburgh was able to help direct the passion and commitment of private sector chefs towards community organisations that had greater levels of need. As well as helping organize efforts, Edible Edinburgh drew attention to the need to record, evaluate and learn from initiatives. This had been a problem in the past where there was a lack of evidence to help make informed judgements of which activities had been more or less successful. This has been a priority when engaging with public sector agencies that needed a level of accountability to inform their decisions.

In Glasgow, in addition to partners getting involved in various food emergency related projects the partnership focussed on supporting practical initiatives to promoting local food. Key among these was the [Chef's Challenge](#). Started in 2018 as part of the SFP [Veg Cities](#) Campaign, Chef's Challenge aims to promote local produce and the city's food scene through the form of a competition

where chefs from Glasgow restaurants compete to produce the best dish from locally grown veg.

Although it's framed as a competition, the chef's challenge is all about the collaboration between growing spaces throughout the city, and our city's thriving food scene. It's about celebrating the possibilities presented by locally grown veg, through the efforts of growers and volunteers in community gardens, and the way chefs can transform them into great dishes.²⁴

The pandemic forced a major rethink of the event, which involved using an outdoor cooking space in the city's east end for the cook off finale and increased use of social media both in the run up to and during the event. Through the involvement of Cate Devine, a notable Scottish food writer, and Gary Maclean, Scotland's national chef, the event and its emphasis on local supply chains, cooking with vegetables and the quality of the city's hospitality sector was featured on BBC Radio Scotland and a Sunday National newspaper.²⁵

The highlight of this project has been the great sense of community and participation that made the Chef's Challenge possible under ... challenging circumstances. People were very willing to ... help make an event happen. Health and food have been more relevant than ever in this year and that seemed to strike a chord with a lot of the chefs who participated. They really took the message on board and went all out to create beautiful, delicious, and inspiring dishes, and were all blown away by the quality of the produce our amazing gardeners had managed to produce. In a year where we have seen empty supermarket shelves and shortages on a scale not seen in a very long time, the importance of locally grown food had real resonance.²⁶

Catering and procurement

11. Towards dynamic purchasing through new collaborations and digital connectivity

Despite attention on the emergency response, the subject of food procurement has become an increasing field for action in local food partnership areas. Brexit and the possibilities of UK divergence from EU regulatory and funding formulas has led to a renewed focus on purchasing practices. Disruption to the economy put a spotlight on supply chains, and specifically the resilience of local supply. The pandemic accelerated digital innovation and in particular the role of e-commerce to match producers and purchasers.

Among the UK nations, Scotland has had a relatively energetic policy context for procurement following the Scottish Government's discussion 'Recipe for Success' in 2014. During the pandemic Edible **Edinburgh's** Economy Working Group continued to convene information sessions for businesses to get involved in tendering for public catering contracts. The group has built strong relationships with specialist advisors through the Supplier Development Programme and Soil Association. Increasingly the LFPs in Scotland are collaborating to share learning in this area.

Some LFPs have reached a point of maturity where leadership on aspects of food procurement were clearly devolved during the pandemic. In **Cardiff** the expertise and experience of the council's food catering procurement team meant that there were clear protocols in place around out of school food for children entitled to free school meals. The ability to clearly define spheres for action enabled the partners in Cardiff to use their resources effectively. As with Scotland, a supportive policy framework in Wales is helping to maintain attention on procurement issues.

[Dynamic Purchasing UK](#) was launched in December 2021 to establish regional digital marketplaces allowing SME producers and caterers to consolidate orders and deliveries. Dynamic purchasing builds upon the work in Bath and North East Somerset local authority, an early SFP member. During the pandemic, dynamic food purchasing systems have been made increasingly viable through the substantial shift online of food businesses and interest in resilient short supply chains. Good Food Oxford's push to establish an **Oxfordshire** partnership has been partly driven by the local economic potential to link rural producers to urban clients as demonstrated during the pandemic. The partnership is interested in developing a dynamic food procurement platform that is

linked to its Oxfordshire Food Access Services Database and Map. Partnerships in Scotland and the Northeast of England have developed regional collaborations to try and tackle some of the most intractable barriers to sustainable procurement.

It was hardly surprising that interviewees reported that long-term work on food procurement had paused during the earlier part of the crisis. Due to other priorities, **Bristol** Food Network decided to hold back its innovative work on food procurement as part of its bid for the SFP Gold Award. Nevertheless, [Bristol's GfG Procurement](#) strategic agenda is set to build upon '*fantastic progress [particularly through the two Bristol universities] in terms of developing policies, putting food at the centre of sustainability strategies, responding to student demands for improved food offerings, etc all of which have a direct impact on food procurement in the City'* (p.1). Bristol city council is the first public body to signal its intention to pilot the national Future Food Framework, the new national dynamic food procurement model due to go live in 2022.

The digital innovation message also relates to the increasingly smart tech driven use of apps to link producers and consumers outside the public sector procurement sphere. Using digital technology, **Cambridge** Sustainable Food has trialled the use of veg box deliveries to families entitled to Healthy Start Vouchers. Such initiatives illustrate the growth of small-scale e-commerce platforms to achieve social and environmental goals. In Northern Ireland, **Belfast** food partnership has established links with [Source Grow](#), a platform to help farmers decide what to grow to meet market demand. Source Grow links restaurants with growers and provides a marketplace where restaurants can place one order with multiple growers.

Food for the planet

12. Putting food at the centre of planetary health

SFP has been a main driving force behind an international campaign ([The Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration](#)) calling on local government to put food at the heart of climate policy. With few local climate and environmental policies reflecting the interdependency of food and the environment, the SFP [Food for the Planet](#) workstream, through a package of resourcing, expert advice, tools and [campaign materials](#), empowered food partnerships to drive this much needed integration in local policy.

To focus attention on food at COP26, Sustainable Food Places worked with international organisations IPES, FAO, ICLEI, C40 and MUFPP in the development of The Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration and associated campaigns strategy. As part of this, the leader of [Glasgow](#) City Council called on all SFP local authority leaders to sign the declaration. Approximately one third of the 100 international signatories to date are SFP member areas.

The SFP [Food for the Planet](#) campaign has already recruited 21 local area members, 16 of whom are SFP Partnerships. Through actions taken to date, the network has saved an estimated 5,111 tonnes of CO₂. Membership of the campaign gives access to a toolkit that supports practical action on nature and the climate emergency in policy, the local economy, land-use, food waste and procurement.

Several SFP LFPs and associated key stakeholders including [Birmingham](#) (Incredible Surplus CIC), [Brighton and Hove](#) Food Partnership and the Real Junk Food Project Brighton CIC, [Lambeth](#) (Incredible Edible), [Glasgow, Middlesbrough](#) and [North Lancashire](#) (LESS CIC and Lancaster District Community & Voluntary Solutions) were awarded significant grants by the Lottery Climate Action Fund for projects that focus on food or have a strong food dimension.

[Brighton and Hove's](#) Lottery Climate Fund bid was built on work to tackle food waste (including partnering with WRAP on the first Food Waste Action Week in March 2021 and working with Brighton Council to mandate use of the food waste hierarchy into their Good Food Buying Standards) that was funded through an SFP Food for the Planet (FFTP) pilot grant.

[Cambridge](#) used their FFTP pilot grant to help embed food into the city's climate change strategy and to run a food and planet public engagement campaign.

The pandemic drew the public's attention to food waste²⁷; reducing it and redeploying it to preserve what is now recognised as a precious resource. In the home of COP26 and as [Glasgow's](#) hospitality sector began to recover in late 2021, *Plate up for Glasgow* engaged 41 cafés, restaurants and bars to offer at least one low waste 'Food Hero' menu item. With over 4,192²⁸ low waste dishes and drinks served over a five-week period, the campaign has had a lasting impact with 88% of venues pledging to keep their low waste dish on the menu and many inspired to address the sustainability of their operations more broadly.

During the pandemic, the scaling up of edible food waste redeployment was one of the most salient contributions that SFP places made to the Food for the Planet theme.

Pre-pandemic [Bristol](#) had already identified food waste as a Going for Gold area of excellence. Poor data and challenges around mapping and coordinating the many organisations and initiatives that operate in this arena make this a difficult area to tackle strategically.

The LFP established a Food Waste Action Group (FWAG) bringing in community initiatives, NGOs, businesses, and public sector organisations to build a knowledge base and identify and implement solutions. As well as commissioning significant pieces of research to help guide action, FWAG focused on opportunities where collaborative action could reduce unavoidable food waste and ensure that edible surplus food was accessible to citizens experiencing food poverty. FareShare South West and Resource Futures worked to develop an accurate picture of food waste supply, distribution, and community needs. With over nine agencies working in this area, this intelligence was vital in matching up donors and recipients to effectively scale up the re-deployment of surplus food during the pandemic.

Local food futures

Learning from the pandemic and future directions for Local Food Partnerships

The past two years have been an intense period for local food partnerships. Through interviews and progress reports, coordinators and other members reflected upon the impacts and challenges of their work and the implications for future action.

Many LFPs have broadened, deepened, and consolidated their partnerships, often including new types of organisations and related agendas. For example, age friendly work with older people's CVS agencies in **Brighton and Hove**; refugee support and inter-faith partnerships in **Oxfordshire**. In **Newcastle**, the Public Health found that *"a whole range of organisations who previously hadn't been involved in food stepped forward."*

While no UK-wide data is available on the situation prior to the pandemic, local authorities holding SFP awards were clearly well placed to act on **existing strategic plans** to respond to both the immediate food emergency food crisis and the aftermath. The contrasting performance between LFP and non-LFP areas has been most clearly documented in **London boroughs**.²⁹

SFP funding helped stabilize some LFPs and to take action at a precarious point in the crisis. Funding from SFP to **Calderdale** helped sustain the partnership and play to the strength of its collaborative food system work in the authority area, particularly in sustainable food procurement work. SFP funding provided a 'wonderful catalyst to encouraging us to become even better at what we were already doing' as evidenced in Its successful bronze award application.

The pandemic represented a testing moment for some LFPs to deal with local political and organisational divisions. The emotional effort and pace of delivery was leaving some interviewees feeling 'tired' and 'exhausted'. Nevertheless, their navigation through these challenges indicated the **resilience of the food partnership model** when put into action under pressure.

Many LFPs found that the pandemic was a chance to open a **wider public conversation about the future of food**. In **North Lancashire** *"we used that moment of disruption as an opportunity to build on the energy and questions that we're raising around how resilient our current food system is... With bare shelves in supermarkets, we saw it as a chance to question where our food comes from."*

The shift to online meetings greatly enhanced the **number and diversity of stakeholders participating in LFP events**. This change helped start new projects, while the intensity of these meetings has declined, most

new links and collaborations do not appear to have been 'undone'.

For some areas, the strong performance of LFPs provided a platform from which to **win ambitious programme bids**. Areas such as **Birmingham, Brighton and Hove, Glasgow, Lambeth, Middlesbrough, North Lancashire** and **Tower Hamlets** have made successful applications to the Lottery's Climate Action Fund. While interviewees felt that this achievement represented long-term relationship building, many LFPs are emerging from the pandemic as **strongly embedded partners in local government led strategy**. In SFP Gold Award cities, the work of **Bristol** and **Brighton and Hove** LFPs are embedded in long-term strategic plans. Bristol's sustainable food vision and goals have been written into the long-term One City Plan and the period of the pandemic has fuelled the food and equality ambitions of the city's senior leadership team. Central to this is expanding the food movement in Bristol and bringing new voices to the table.

Brighton and Hove Food Partnership's focus on 'a whole city approach to food' features as a key area for action in the local 10-year health and wellbeing strategy.

Council officers suddenly want to talk to us who hadn't been as interested before. [LFP Coordinator]

Aberdeen and **Glasgow** LFPs are both represented in their respective Local Outcomes Improvement Plans. **Hull** has diversified its sources of support alongside the council in order to reflect the breadth of local food system stakeholders, a goal they made progress on in late 2021 through linking the local plan to UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Many LFPs have an increasingly **central role in efforts to address food insecurity**. They are championing the agendas of affordable food, dignity principles, cash first and upstream solutions. However, while there is a desire to move beyond the foodbank, coordinators are concerned about a combination of the increasing need and the 'frontline exhaustion' of staff and volunteers.

Food Banks – and larders, fridges etc. are appropriate for different people at different times. I just don't think we can move away from food banks at this point in time. [Oxfordshire LFP Coordinator]

There's still like this huge crisis in terms of emergency food support need, and yet we have less volunteers to help with surplus food distribution model. [North Lancashire LFP Coordinator]

I worry about sustainability: we need to withdraw early on and not institutionalise this because it's not a response we can keep up. I'm worried we go from 'good guys feeding people to become the bad guys withdrawing food' [Brighton and Hove LFP Coordinator]

Many partnership coordinators emphasised that their partnerships have a very democratic, inclusive structure and actively avoid top-down ways of working. The **distributed decision-making, 'holacratic' governance of LFPs** makes the impacts of lead actors sometimes harder to evidence but was felt to best reflect the values of partners.

We have a flat governance structure within our partnership [with] working groups themed around parts of our food system. They're all connected by this big picture group. [North Lancashire LFP Coordinator]

*We felt we could best serve the food sector community by **championing their work**, and providing **resources** to explore. Our engagement resources would be best focussed on individuals, communities and non-food sector organisations. [Bristol LFP Coordinator]*

We're trying to be as democratic and inclusive as possible. We talk about 'food partnership activity' because there isn't just one food partnership. Sheffield

Food **Cardiff**'s LFP model is highly devolved and increasingly seeks to support autonomous neighbourhood food networks. For example, the partnership convened an autumn festival initially without the offer of funding. While funds later became available, a strong positive indication was that groups applied to run events anyway *"I think people would have organised a lot of events regardless of funding value of doing it."* [LFP Coordinator]

LFP coordinators cannot and do not need to lead action on all fronts. For example, **Brighton and Hove** Food Partnership was clear that the mutual aid movement arose largely independently from other action. The focus of mutual aid groups on food access for those struggling to obtain supplies (but able to afford them) meant that BHFP could focus more on highly vulnerable groups.

Food **Cardiff** had little direct role in school food provision, largely because they knew that the local authority catering service and council officers had a strong track record in this area. This recognition allowed the partnership to focus its attention elsewhere.

Despite the lack of in-person contact and acute awareness of different contexts, a common need to solve issues quickly brought many **members closer together through the SFP Network** and Rise-Up List (the SFP group email list). Alongside national debates about the current food system, Network members interviewed reported that through collective action, local food issues had obtained a higher profile than before the pandemic.

Discussion and conclusions

Achievements, impacts and the case for Local Food Partnerships

In this section we discuss the achievements and impacts of LFPs and SFP in wider context. Challenges arising during the Covid crisis appear to validate SFP's core call to action for locally integrated food strategies. 'Food and Place' has become a highly visible issue that attracts public interest and the attention of governments. Four main arguments for local food partnerships as a part of the solution revolve around their effectiveness, efficiency, engagement and equity.

Impacts and achievements of Local Food Partnerships and the Sustainable Food Places programme

Evidence from LFPs before and during the pandemic shows how they have created impacts for a range of intended beneficiaries and wider stakeholders. For **the populations** they serve, LFPs directly raised food aid funding through popular subscription, grant applications and actions to re-direct funding. In localities where they had the greatest influence, LFPs were able to channel public resources and actively organise provisions to meet the food assistance needs of groups with high levels of need.

Particularly with regard to assistance for children and young people, LFPs promoted the nutritional quality of food provision and resisted unhealthy food donations or purchasing practices. LFPs led specific projects on tailoring food supplies to meet needs of diverse populations such as refugees, homeless people, and specific cultural groups. This work followed on from pre-Covid LFP experience in addressing food insecurity and the delivery of food poverty action plans. It also built upon the work of SFP sponsored campaigns notably of Food Power, Sugar Smart and Veg Cities, where campaign show evidence of behavioural changes in LFP areas of delivery.

LFPs have also been responsible for efforts to organise access to affordable food through food pantry and similar membership projects, food growing sites and community-based kitchen and cooking projects. Much of this work has moved the food security agenda on from reactive forms of food aid projects.

It is important to understand that LFPs are not necessarily set up as direct service delivery agencies but operate to convene and optimise the work of their network partners. Therefore, many of the impacts and achievements of LFP are with respect to capacity building **for community groups and grass-roots voluntary agencies** – these in turn deliver direct benefits for individuals. In many areas, the pandemic led to greater LFP engagement with grassroots food initiatives, often building on large scale voluntary engagement in food support at the level of local

neighbourhoods. For many people, these actions converted into wider involvement in food-focused organisations and networks. Local food partnerships were active in bringing together and mobilising these grassroots groups to create an agenda for good food.

For food businesses, LFPs harnessed energy in the food hospitality sector to get more actively involved in social and environmental food causes. A remarkable feature of the pandemic was the scale and variety of meals provision services delivered through these catering teams who operating through a wide range of venues and organisations. Many LFP staff taking part in our research showed how this injection of energy is changing local food economies. In some cases, LFPs have worked towards dynamic purchasing through new producer-purchaser collaborations and opportunities enabled through e-commerce.

More broadly LFPs acted as hubs for information gathering and sharing between multiple types of agencies. Food partnership coordinators in particular acted as centres for information gathering and sharing. They played a pivotal role sharing intelligence about what was happening across a locality in terms of population and agency needs and what different organisations were able to offer.

For local authorities and cross-sectoral bodies, LFPs provided a source of systems leadership drawing upon unique experience and insight on multiple aspects of the foodscape and on the potential for collaborations between public, private and third sector agencies. For more established food partnerships this is translating into directly shaping the long-term strategic plans of local authorities. As the SFP Network grows, notable feature of LFPs is the pace of their adaptation to different political geographies, from operations with large metropolitan and unitary authorities to rural and market-town boroughs. This reflects a re-balancing of the Network towards rural areas and provides increasing opportunities to focus on food system changes related to agriculture, land use and re-localised supply chains, as well as to connect this supply end of the food system with the demand end of urban food partnerships.

Understanding impacts and achievements: context, national support and local expertise

With several years of experience in the field, LFPs were well placed to take an integrated approach to the food issues that have been thrown into greater visibility in the past two years. The combination of problems linked to the pandemic, Brexit and the climate and nature emergency amounted to a window of opportunity for LFPs to show their unique position in bringing together diverse local policy actors around cross-cutting solutions.

During the pandemic, the SFP programme enabled the impacts of LFPs through pivoting towards a more flexible approach to grants and the provision of additional funds. SFP changed the focus of its capacity building work – professional resources, networking, campaigns, and advisory services – to respond to the needs of the pandemic. The SFP national team reached out to local authorities and third sector bodies to advise on the local food partnership model, and particularly on emergency food and food poverty action planning. More widely the SFP national team used their convening power to broker links between leading policy actors. With rapid growth in membership, SFP expanded its scale and reach during the pandemic. An aspect of recent memberships has been the range of new geographies, including counties, county boroughs and districts.

The specific operations of LFPs reflect their organisational history and local social geographies. These differences illustrate the adaptability of the general SFP model. The degree of engagement from local authorities is an important factor in explaining the delivery style of LFPs. While many LFPs are embedded within local authority structures or are authorised to take a lead on local authority food issues, other LFPs have stronger roots in the community and voluntary sector and need to work harder to obtain local authority engagement. LFPs adjust how they frame the six SFP food issues to match local priorities and opportunities. Other organisational differences between LFPs include the degree of delegation between partnership members and task groups. This autonomy can reflect the maturity of partnerships. The most well-established LFPs were able to operate quickly due to a high level of trust built up between partnership members prior to Covid. Long-term relationships meant that partners worked effectively within their sphere of expertise.

Evidence from the pandemic shows how the knowledge, skills and backgrounds of key individuals have been at the heart of understanding the achievements of LFPs and the SFP programme more generally. Local food transformation work requires an extraordinary blend of 'hard and soft expertise' that brings together technical knowledge and local insights with enlightened leadership, entrepreneurialism, business development, systems thinking and communication skills. LFPs and

their broader local networks thrive with passionate, inspirational people from many walks of life. Much of the work of the SFP national partnership has been to bring together members of LFPs as a community of practice, to celebrate their work, and give a platform for their aspirations and achievements. Despite limited capacity, LFP members get some staff development support through local authority teams (particularly in public health and community development) and CVSE infrastructure organisations. However, the work of coordinators, chairs, task group leads, and others is complex and demanding.

Despite the continued support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (and in Phase 3 the National Lottery Community Fund), this work remains chronically unrecognised and under-resourced.

The National Food Strategy recommendation to require every area to have a local food strategy is a welcome step. Nevertheless, if LFPs are to deliver their potential impact, attention must also be given to embedding, supporting, and resourcing local food system leadership and delivery teams.

Conclusions: four arguments for the value of Local Food Partnerships

In this study we examined the role of SFP local food partnerships during the pandemic, the context to their actions, and learning moving forward. Pulling together themes in this report, four main arguments for the value of local food partnerships come to the foreground. These revolve around *effectiveness*, *efficiency*, *engagement*, and *equity*³⁰.

In terms of **effectiveness**, LFPs tackle the fragmented and siloed operations of the local food systems. Working across complex and cross-boundary environments, LFPs are a unique type of partnership that help coordinate action on dysfunctions and opportunities for change in local food systems. Regarding **efficiency**, LFPs encourage public, private and third sector agencies to collaborate and share resources. Examples from SFP member areas show how this partnership model provided a powerful way to create efficiencies, eliminate duplication and create innovative solutions. From the standpoint of **engagement**, LFPs are designed to focus action on the interests of people and environment, ahead of the convenience of providers. This requires having mechanisms for consultation and co-production. LFPs are configured to engage lived experiences and to find shared visions for change. Finally, in terms of **equity**, LFPs respond to the moral and legal case for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion through their open networks, outreach, and democratic structure. In embracing multiple voices, LFPs act as collectives working for food system leadership at the local level.

Annex 1. Methods

This study adopted a case study approach to draw out central themes from the experiences of individuals engaged with SFP-funded local food partnerships. This analysis was combined from report-based data from across the SFP national programme.

The introduction to the report summarised the main research questions. At the outset of the research the full set of questions were as follows:

- a. What have been the achievements of local food partnerships and the Sustainable Food Places programme in the Covid pandemic?
- b. What impacts did LFPs create during the pandemic for key beneficiaries and stakeholders?
- c. How and in what circumstances were these impacts achieved? What was the role of SFP and the network in supporting LFPs?
- d. What challenges were encountered and how were they addressed by LFPs and SFP?
- e. What did the pandemic events tell us about the significance of LFPs in food system and social change?
- f. To what extent were places with LFPs better able to respond to issues arising from the pandemic?
- g. How did LFPs and SFP change the local food movement landscape over the course of the pandemic? What are some implications for the future?
- h. How have LFPs used the crisis to drive food system and social change?

Between November 2021 and January 2022, we conducted 29 interviews and eleven written communications with local food coordinators and associated stakeholders in 23 SFP member areas.

The sample was taken from areas that had received an SFP Grant during the period of the pandemic with an aim to represent different types of LFP geography. These sources of information were supplemented through an analysis of grant reports written by local food coordinators from across the programme.

These areas included all home nations. We also drew upon an analysis of grant reports, award applications and SFP covid case study reports relating 22 SFP member areas. During the late stage of the research, we undertook a focus group interview with three lead members of the national SFP team. This provided us with an opportunity to check our key lines of enquiry.

The interviews were fully transcribed and analysed through a framework analysis³¹ of the main areas of interest in line with the six core issues of the SFP programme. We plotted the main themes arising from the interviews and documentary analysis against each of the 21 SFP member areas.

All interviews were asked to provide verbal or recorded written consent for the interview. We informed interviewees that we sought to include the names of SFP member areas to identify specific areas of activity relevant to the research. Ethical approval for the study was provided by the UWE Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Table 1. SFP member places and links to areas for focus for case studies

While specific names of partnership vary, in this report we abbreviate LFPs to the name of the local authority

	SFP Member	Case study number												Learning	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12		
1	Tower Hamlets														
2	Cambridge														
3	North Lancashire														
4	Edinburgh														
5	Merton														
6	Hull														
7	Plymouth														
8	Sheffield														
9	Oxfordshire														
10	Birmingham														
11	Cardiff														
12	Greenwich														
13	Belfast														
14	Brighton and Hove														
15	Calderdale														
16	Middlesbrough														
17	Aberdeen														
18	Glasgow														
19	Newcastle														
20	Carlisle														
21	County Durham														
22	Leeds														
23	Bristol														

Figure 4. SFP membership map and location of case study areas in the study



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Sustainable Food Places network members

Aberdeen
Arun and Chichester
Belfast
Birmingham
Blackburn with Darwen
Blaenau Gwent
Brighton and Hove
Bristol
Buckinghamshire
Bury
Calderdale
Cambridge
Cardiff
Carlisle
Clackmannanshire
County Durham
Coventry
Derby
Derry and Strabane
Devon
Doncaster
Dumfries and Galloway
Eastbourne
Edinburgh
Exeter
Fife
Glasgow
Greater London
Greater Manchester
Greenwich
Herefordshire
Highland
Hull
Islington
Lambeth
Leeds
Leicester
Leicestershire
Lewisham
Lincolnshire
Liverpool
Luton
Manchester City
Merton
Mid and East Antrim
Middlesbrough
Monmouthshire
Newcastle
Newry, Mourne and Down
North Ayrshire
North Lancashire
North Lincolnshire
Nottingham
Oldham
Oxfordshire
Plymouth
Rhondda Cynon Taf
Sheffield
South Lanarkshire
Southwark
Stirling
Tameside
Tower Hamlets
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Wandsworth
Wells
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